

Making more of the Natural and Cultural Heritage of our Coast

July 8th 2014 Arden House Hotel Kirkcudbright

Chair : Gordon Mann CEO D&G Chamber of Commerce

The Southern Uplands Partnership has been part of a European Project called Eurotour Heritage that has focussed on 7 European rural areas and has the following objectives:

- Boost the participation of communities in promoting cultural heritage;
- Raise awareness among young people in rural areas and introduce them to heritage-related occupations;
- Define local strategies and programmes promoting cultural heritage for tourism;
- Create a network of cultural tourism offers.

Throughout the project The Southern Uplands Partnership have been looking at opportunities to create a Dumfries and Galloway coastal path to as a stimuli to help promote the natural and cultural heritage in the region. SUP invited almost 30 representatives from businesses and organisations to come together for a one day event to explore the opportunities for making more of that natural and cultural heritage along our coastline. The group were treated to a range of presentations that laid the ground works for an afternoon of workshops.

Vyv Wood-Gee outlined her involvement over many years of developing long distance access routes across the UK with a specific focus on the work she has been involved in for the last three years on behalf of SUP researching, specifying and negotiating a route along the coast of D&G. She highlighted the many issues that need to be overcome regarding land owner agreements, difficult terrain and live stock but also the many benefits that can be attained. These included a substantial economic value to the region with the newly opened Welsh Coastal way estimated to be worth over £32m in its first year and the SW Coast Path in Devon and Cornwall estimated to bring in over £420m /p.a. to the SW of England. She also highlighted the health and well being benefits and the fantastic array of both natural and cultural heritage attractions that line our coast. With some of the D&G coastal route being recognised by Scottish Government as a priority under NPF3 she highlighted the need to develop shovel ready projects that can be implemented as soon as funding is identified.

Nick Cooke from the Scottish Pilgrims Route Forum highlighted the wide interest in development of pilgrimage routes. He outlined the history of such routes and how in modern life they were often seen as a spiritual experience but not necessarily a religious one. Interest in such routes is growing widely not least due to Santiago del Compostela which attracts thousands of pilgrims every year. Again he cited Scottish Government support for such developments with the Fife Pilgrims way, Iona to St Andrews and Glasgow to Whithorn being specifically mentioned in the recent NPF3 document. He highlighted the work of James Cormack Brown particularly in getting the St Ninian's Way recognised as part of the European Cultural Route Network.

Nic Coombey spoke widely of the natural heritage of our coastline. He highlighted a vast array of projects that he'd been delivering under the Making the Most of the Coast project on behalf of



Solway Firth Partnership. Nic spoke widely of the opportunity to use art to highlight environmental issues with examples that ranged from the gathering of footballs washed up on our beaches that were photographed as part of an awareness ranging project coinciding with the 2014 World Cup, to the creation of an enormous sea monster by artists and communities made from rubbish washed onto our beaches. He talked about the challenges of plastic that never goes away just breaking down into smaller and smaller pieces that are then mistaken for plankton by marine life leading to a range of health issues. He also highlighted the heritage along our beaches from historic buildings to old mill stones hewn out of the rocks near castle point.

Our final speaker of the morning was Catriona McMillan who gave us an insight into the development of Whithorn as a centre of pilgrimage going back to the 5th century and St Ninian. She too talked about how the days of prostrating pilgrims walking bare foot in sack cloths were no more and how the modern pilgrim is just as likely to be interested in walking and spiritual contemplation as religion. She highlighted a range of fascinating remnants on the Machars including holy wells and caves that were traditionally visited by pilgrims. Of particular note were the challenges of finding many of these sites which highlighted a need for more proactive signing if we want visitors to be able to visit the.

The morning's speakers acted as a great source of inspiration for an afternoon of workshops looking specifically at the opportunities that long distance routes such as the coastal path and pilgrims route offer the region. Along with a session looking at how we can do more to highlight the vast array of culture heritage opportunities the region offers to locals, businesses and visitors alike.



Making more of the Natural and Cultural Heritage of our Coast Workshop Notes

Workshop session on Trails. Main discussion points and priorities for action.

It was agreed that there was significant value in having high-quality themed trails – whether coastal or pilgrimage or other. The area needed more reasons for people to come to D&G and walking was under-developed so new trails would be a good thing.

There were two strong messages about the priority. One was that we should not wait for the whole coastal route to be available before starting to promote it (although care was needed because routes needed a start and end point and ideally car-parking and other infrastructure such as toilets, shops, etc). If we had two sections that were “shovel-ready” we should proceed to get them installed and marketed. It was pointed out that much of the coastal route (and pilgrimage route) was already in place and usable but that it needed to be marketed. The information on the routes was out there – often on-line as well – but it was not being promoted.

The second message was that having a coastal trail would be a significant boost to a struggling local economy and that we should therefore aspire to achieve it and not be put-off by the likely cost or difficulty. 7stanes showed what an impact could be had when a new vision is implemented, and the coastal trail could be as important. The vision needed to be driven and ought to be included in the Council’s economic strategy (part of the route is already identified as a priority in the National Planning Framework).

The Glasgow to Whithorn Pilgrim route was already walkable but was not yet mapped, signed or promoted. It was suggested that undertaking a path survey to cost works would be useful so that it too would be “shovel-ready” when funding became available.

It was suggested that much marketing could be achieved using social media, eg facebook, to promote walks and to encourage feedback on them. There was a clear link here to the Wild Seasons approach.

The issue of path maintenance was raised. Various options, from path wardens, maintenance squads, using SRDP and visitor pay-back schemes were suggested. It was agreed that the paths had to be good quality so that visitors had a positive experience. Good signage, quality gates and good information were all important.

Strong funding applications require projects to have a clear theme eg a coastal trail– much harder to get funding for smaller path sections.

The links to Walking Festivals were pointed out – and the potential of marketing to walking groups, although there can be difficulty in accommodating larger groups if there is not a suitable hotel. The Newton Stewart Walking Festival was promoting a range of local walks of different degrees of difficulty and this approach could be extended.



It was felt that there was no shortage of information – there were any number of leaflets, books on walks and you could find info on-line if you knew where to look, but there was too little active promotion of these data sources or of the walking potential of the region overall.

The target audience was discussed. There was a view that we should be marketing the region abroad – and making information available in other languages to facilitate this. There was another view – that we should be prioritising local people because they would then act as ambassadors for the region and market it that way.

Providing info in useful forms was stressed. Eg – it may be that people might want a coastal walk, or a wheelchair friendly one, or a short walk for children and it would be helpful if such walks could be easily identified. This led to the idea of a portal site of some sort – promoting all the walks (and cycle and horse-riding routes) and allowing them to be categorised and then sign-posting further information. Again Wild Seasons could develop this service.

It was suggested that some of the work required to get this established could be done cheaply using internships.

Finally a little time was spent on how to engage with businesses.

It was suggested that sponsorship should be considered – eg of particular signs or gates where a local business might be willing to help. Larger business might sponsor a whole section.

Some businesses would benefit from knowing more about the scale of the market and how to take advantage of it. The success of Moffat as a Walkers Welcome town was flagged.

A possible bid to VS Growth Fund was suggested – perhaps as a way of covering the cost of an intern.



Cultural Heritage Workshop

The focus of the workshop was how we can do more to direct people towards the cultural heritage opportunities in the region, can we learn lessons from wild season, do natural and cultural heritage have to be considered separately and can we engage businesses in the opportunities.

It was agreed from the outset that both natural and cultural heritage were generally complimentary to each other.

It was generally recognised that over the years there have been many good websites developed that promote cultural attractions across the region. Some of these are still current being managed by specific organisations other have been time limited due to project funding. The challenge with the later is ensuring they are still maintained and current due to issues over long term funding. Either way it was recognised that often it was public funding that had created them and we should be looking at how we utilise the content on into the future.

Finding many of these websites, particularly those not associated with known heritage organisations can be challenging.

It was felt that one option was to create a portal website that sign posted its users to other local website areas of further information on cultural heritage.

The issue of future funding of such a website was considered particularly in relation to the issues of state aid and publicly funded sites, various options were suggested as worthy of further exploration including private sponsorship, crowd funding and development of a trading arm.

Sponsorship opportunities included the development of high quality video footage broadcast on a local TV channel with associated advertising opportunities and the development of “community networks” again with advertising opportunities.

There was some discussion about the creation of hard copy leaflets and the associated costs for print and distribution but also that many people still like to read “paper” as opposed to “swiping” a screen.

The creation of themed trails using QR codes and geo caching were also discussed as option that can make visiting sites more interesting by creating “treasure trail” experiences.

The importance of engaging businesses / communities was highlighted particularly through the development of business workshops and familiarisation trips. This led onto discussion centred around the opportunities for development of a guiding services who can offer a packaged experience of a tour, food, transport and accommodation.

In Summary it was agreed that key actions were;

- Audit existing websites



- Explore alternative funding options
- Consider development of an event for 2017 year of History, Heritage and Archaeology that can be used to promote the region



southern uplands partnership
living land, living community

